

**East Africa Regional ICT Workshop  
Accelerating Deployment of Broadband Networks  
Kigali, Rwanda 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2007**

*Summary of the Proceedings*

**Introduction**

Mr. Garland T. McCoy, President of the Global Digital Freedom Institute (GDFI), opened the workshop by welcoming the 40 plus participants and introducing the discussion leaders including U.S. Ambassador David A. Gross, U.S. Coordinator for International Communications & Information Policy, U.S. Department of State, Mr. Tom Carnegie, Director of Telecommunications and IT Policy for Africa, U.S. Department of State, Mr. Russell Southwood, Principle, Balancing Act-Africa, and Kristin Peterson, Chair & Co-Founder of Inveneo.

Mr. McCoy acknowledged the ground breaking accord U.S. Ambassador David A. Gross and his colleagues from other U.S. Government agencies had helped to facilitate (see attachment A) that was signed by the ICT ministers from the five countries making up the East Africa Regional meeting; Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, and Tanzania. This accord addressed significant policy and regulatory concerns regarding the arrival of the undersea fiber optic cable to the region.

Mr. McCoy then underlined the principle reasons for convening the workshop; namely, as a follow-on forum for discussing ideas, challenges and opportunities presented by the implementation of a unified East African broadband deployment policy as outlined in the Joint Communiqué (Attachment A), and summary report of the East Africa Broadband Deployment conference hosted by the Honorable Paul Butare, Minister of Infrastructure for Rwanda on May 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> in Kigali (Attachment B).

Mr. McCoy introduced U.S. Ambassador David A. Gross who thanked the participants (Attachment C) for attending the GDFI workshop. He noted that the meeting brought together a wealth of East African leaders with a common interest in seeing broadband networks and associated service applications made available throughout the region at affordable rates. He urged participants to think through how broadband connectivity could be brought to universities in all five countries, and how this and other goals highlighted in the Joint Communiqué could best be accomplished through the collaborative actions of users, service providers, regulators and other stakeholders.

## **Expanding ICT Possibilities**

Ambassador Gross' remarks were followed by Mr. Russell Southwood who noted that he has been working on ICT issues in Africa for the past 6 years. He remarked that contrary to "popular" opinion, Africa has made considerable progress in promoting ICT development in recent years – primarily through liberalizing ICT markets and creating favorable policies for international cables. He went on to point out; however, that there are still significant obstacles which, for discussion purposes, he grouped into three categories: international, regional, and local.

With respect to all three he stressed the need for industry leaders as well as government officials to place less focus on the structure and mechanics of providing network services, and more on ways of enabling users to better define what they need in terms of improved service quality, lower prices, wider coverage and more diverse service applications.

With respect to key regional issues, Mr. Southwood noted that land-locked countries in East Africa will face special challenges in keeping broadband connectivity widely affordable given distances from their local Internet connection points and the landing stations of undersea fiber optic cables. He urged conference participants to respond to the latter challenge by actively promoting more investment in competitive fiber routes interconnecting with undersea cables, making greater use of regional or local wireless facilities where investment in fiber optic links is not economically feasible, and encouraging more competition among Internet service providers – all in accord with the Joint Communiqué.

As to local issues, Mr. Southwood reminded workshop participants that the key to rendering Internet access more affordable throughout East Africa is to find ways of spreading (largely fixed) network costs over greater numbers of service applications. He noted, for instance, that reasonably widespread access to the Internet would afford small scale service providers unparalleled opportunities to provide niche products or services. And that the availability and use of these many new applications would create the value and revenue growth that network operators need to deploy broadband facilities on a widespread basis, while at the same time lowering prices for Internet connections.

Therein, according to Mr. Southwood, lies the need to change mentality in order to boost low-price and high volume throughout the value chain, and to target millions not thousands of users. As part of that process, he further urged the conference participants to look beyond current service applications because the user needs of tomorrow will likely be very different from the user needs of today.

At this point in the discussion, U.S. Ambassador David A. Gross reminded the workshop that both developed and developing countries, including the United States, are working to create policies that encourage the rapid roll-out of broadband networks across their nations, especially into rural area. He stressed the important role that broadband and the Internet play in boosting real economic growth and dramatically improving the quality of life in emerging economies. These benefits warranted bringing together African

Ministers with U.S policy makers in Washington D.C and U.S. industry leaders in San Francisco, California this past March. The discussions resulted in recognition that broadband deployment throughout East Africa needs to be regarded and attacked as a regional issue -- with a focus on landing one or more submarine cables in East Africa quickly and developing a common regional regulatory policy framework that encourages the widespread use of that increased connectivity by all countries in the region. The March discussions also led to the invitation by President Paul Kagame to hold a workshop on expanding broadband connectivity in East Africa in May.

Ambassador Gross reminded the participants that it has been challenging in the past to decide the best route for achieving this widely-held goal, but for the first time a clear and commonly held path to the future was beginning to emerge after two days of discussions at the ministerial level. He stressed that for continued progress to be made, more action was needed.

Ambassador Gross urged all participants in the GDFI workshop to play a very active role in developing that approach whether by exerting pressure on political leaders for specific steps that need to be taken (e.g., developing local user groups and IXPs), or on regulators to pursue favorable, pro-market policies. This pressure needs to come from both directions: top down and bottom up.

Ambassador Gross committed to work with every player interested in achieving the goal of expanding connectivity in East Africa. He reminded everyone that broadband deployment is vital to job creation, health, education, and thus, improving the quality of life throughout the region. And that one of the reasons that led to genocide in Rwanda was the lack of a collective voice and access to information. Information saves life in health, education and politics.

### **Opportunity Brainstorming**

Mr. Southwood then opened the workshop to general discussion. In responding to comments by a Ugandan network operator, John Paul Bagiire, that bringing broadband connectivity to East Africa is very difficult, Mr. Tom Carnegie of the U.S. State Department noted that precisely because many of these problems were regional in nature the willingness of East African ICT Ministers to come together in addressing the political ones is an extremely positive development. However, he reminded participants that there are lots of things that still need to be done in the next two years to facilitate the arrival of the submarine cables. He also asked the participants to think about what needs to be done to make sure they can handle the hurdles of cross-border traffic in East Africa that submarine cables will bring about.

Participants then discussed some of these challenges, and potential solutions, including:

- Increasing the availability and lowering the cost of bandwidth
- Encouraging cross-border competition
- Interconnecting competing local fiber networks

- Developing Internet exchange points
- Connecting rural areas
- Training network administrators

Various participants also discussed ways of stimulating the use of broadband service applications in East Africa through the provision of e-Health, e-Education and IP voice applications in rural areas. Mr. Jake Jennings, Associate Bureau Chief of the Federal Communications Commission was introduced by Mr. McCoy and he discussed in detail a recently launched public sector/private sector initiative in the US to provide broadband connectivity to all rural public hospitals and health clinics across America. He cited the significant health and cost benefits associated with this initiative. Additionally, Mr. Jennings discussed some of the solutions available in addressing cross board connectivity problems like “bill and keep” at exchange points. That, however, would require more affordable network connections than are currently available (see Table 1). Another point raised was to strengthen public private partnerships to foster development of the sector.

As noted in the Joint Communiqué, each of the five countries committed to sending representatives to a follow-on workshop in the U.S. later this year at which these and other key issues associated with the completion of an undersea fiber optic cable into east Africa will be discussed at greater length. GDFI hopes to actively participate in that workshop.

The workshop was closed by Mr. Southwood and Mr. McCoy, both of whom thanked the participants for their active participation and contributions and hoped to see all stakeholders working collectively to achieve this goal.